

Poppies, Bluebonnets, and Larkspur

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If you have bluebonnet seeds sitting in a drawer someplace it is time to plant them. Spread the seed out in an area in full sun where it can make contact with the soil. Get them planted before it gets too late in the year.

Another way to begin a bluebonnet patch is to purchase and plant some of the bluebonnet transplants that local nurseries have available. The transplants are in 2 inch or 4-inch containers. At this point they are in a rosette mode which means they are flat against the soil and concentrating on root production until March. The bluebonnets can be planted in a row in the raised bed garden or they can be planted in a container. Once they start growing, one plant will fill a 5-gallon pot. Three transplants will fill a half whiskey barrel. Fertilize bluebonnets planted in containers with Osmocote. Transplants placed in the soil can be fertilized with one application of slow-release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) or "winterizer" fertilizer.

If you are going to use the bluebonnet transplants to begin your patch in a vacant field, plant 5 or more in a cluster with 18 inches between plants. To prosper the transplants must be in full sun but not be placed in a location where they will have to compete with sod or other weeds. That means the most successful naturalized plantings are usually in a vacant patch that has a thin infertile soil. It even works when rocks share the soil surface. Add a small amount of fertilizer near the plants at planting and time the planting so they can be watered in or receive an initial rain. They will bloom in early April and drop their seed by mid-June. It is very important, of course that the seed crop be allowed to mature.

If the idea of starting a wildflower patch with transplants interests you, there is another opportunity this winter. Area nurseries and the Bexar County Master Gardeners are going to be offering a new Maroon "Aggie" Poppy (*Papaver laciniatum* 'Grant's Garnet). Former Bexar County horticulturist and well-known gardening author Greg Grant made the selection of the double maroon poppies from his garden in East Texas. He is seeking gardeners who appreciate the Maroon color of this Aggie Poppy and will agree to cull out any plants with single flowers or red blooms. Note- He does not expect any burnt orange blooms to appear, but it goes without saying that they should be culled as well! Greg and his allies at the Bexar County Master Gardeners want to work with the rest of the gardeners in our area to establish pure drifts of Maroon Poppies! Transplants in 2-inch containers are available at some nurseries now. Transplants in 4-inch containers should be available soon at nurseries and at the Rodeo.

Another plant to consider for naturalizing are bunny-bloom larkspur. The seed packets are available on the seed racks at most nurseries. It can be treated just like bluebonnet seed. Another option is to obtain some transplants. If you can't find a nursery that has transplants available, check out the plant exchanges and your gardening friends. The naturalized larkspur are sprouting now. They tend to take over gardens so most of us with a naturalized population must cull them or make transplants available to others. They transplant easily. Larkspurs produce a good cut flower and are a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds and butterflies.